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MISSISSIPPI NOTEBOOK

By TOM ETHRIDGE

8/7/69



Do 'Black Studies' Distort History?

"BLACK STUDIES" as part of the curricular in America's schools and colleges are being demanded by militant minority leaders to encourage more pride in their race and its achievements.

In this regard, black studies programs could be helpful but only if truthful, and if they are not compulsory courses.

Biggest trouble is that such studies might distort black achievements, gloss over sordid aspects of race history and tend to become black power propaganda deliberately slanted for "hate whitey" purposes . . .

JOSEPH ALSOP, a liberal, syndicated commentator, recently noted that most of Africa's past belongs to "pre-history", of which little is known. When African history begins to be even partially recorded, Alsop pointed out, it is like most history a mixxing of "much evil with some good." For any program to be valid, the evil must be taught with the good.

For example, Alsop noted the many distortions concerning the slave trade. History has tended to ignore the part African tribal chiefs played in this traffic but without their greedy and brutal cooperation, it would not have been possible . . .

BLACK RULERS such as the Obas of Benin and the kings of Whydah and lesser chiefs marched their human merchandise down to the coasts to be sold into slavery by Arab dealers.

New England Yankee trade vessels were prominent in transporting many African slaves to American shores, but there is a widespread impression nowadays that white Southerners were almost entirely responsible for the slave traffic.

The big question, as Joseph Alsop wrote, "is whether 'black studies are going to be historically truthful and therefore intellectually respectable and academically valuable.'" But the nationally esteemed commentator went on to express fears that "hate-promoting" and "black racist bosh" are likely to be emphasized in much of the black studies movement.

"The list of textbooks and suggested background reading for black studies programs bears this out," said the Lynchburg (Va.) News editorially. "The rantings of Negro and Communist radicals and hate promoters predominate. Preposterous claims are made, with no substantiation, no documentation. As contemplated now, the emphasis in many black studies is upon 'hate whitey' and not upon facts or truth."

So where and when such studies are offered, they should

be optional rather than compulsory courses. Many parents do not want their sons and daughters indoctrinated for "Revolution" purposes.

BLACK PROGRESS since the Civil War has been amazing, but it could never have been achieved without white help and friendship. Any black studies program which fails to emphasize thus is unfair and incomplete.

Left to his own devices in his own native Africa, the black man's progress has been conspicuous by its absence.

Thomas Dixon Jr., a famous American author and historian, wrote a candid analysis 67 years ago. He pointed to the Dark Continent of Africa as an indication that Black History there was far from impressive . . .

MR. DIXON WROTE:

"Since the dawn of history the Negro owned the continent of Africa — rich beyond the dream of poet's fancy, crunching acres of diamonds beneath his bare black feet. Yet he never picked one up from the dust until a white man showed him the glittering light. His land swarmed with powerful and docile animals, yet he never dreamed a harness, cart or sled.

"A hunter by necessity, he never made an axe, or weapon worth preserving beyond the moment of its use. He lived as an ox, content to graze for an hour. In a land of stone and timber he never sawed a foot of wood, carved a block or built a house save of broken sticks and mud . . .

"WITH LEAGUE on league of ocean strand and miles of inland seas," Thomas Dixon Jr., wrote, "for four thousand years he watched their surface ripple under the wind, heard the thunder of the surf on his beach, the howl of storm over his head, gazed on the dim blue horizon calling him to worlds beyond — yet he never dreamed a sail. He lived as his fathers lived: stole his food, worked his wife, sold his children, ate his brother, content to drink and sing and dance . . ."

Today, despite heart-breaking laments about Africans being brought here against their will, virtually no American blacks want to go back to Africa. Nor is this surprising, since the Dark Continent still remains the most backward and primitive area on earth, except where white influence prevails.

This, of course, is not likely to be emphasized by black studies which are becoming an "In-Thing" in many schools of our nation.